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Israeli troops storm Shiite village

By Hugh Pope
Reuters

TYRE, Lebanon — Israeli troops yesterday launched their biggest raid yet on a Shiite Muslim village in southern Lebanon as guerrilla attacks against them mounted, security sources said.

In Beirut, the Shiite militia leader threatened reprisals against Israeli villages.

The security sources said about 800 troops and intelligence agents, led by Gen. Ori Orr, Israeli army commander for northern Israel, had stormed Maarakeh, five miles east of the port city of Tyre. Maarakeh is a stronghold of the Shiite Amal movement.

Nabih Berri, leader of the Amal militia, told reporters in Beirut that Israeli villages in Galilee would be attacked in retaliation for Israeli raids on Shiite villages in occupied southern Lebanon.

"From now on, whenever a southern village is attacked, a Galilean village will be hit," he said.

Residents contacted in Maarakeh said the Israelis shot and wounded three people. A man fleeing toward the nearby village of Toura was shot and lay bleeding in the road, according to residents who said Israelis had stopped U.N. peace-keeping troops from going to his rescue.

Three tanks, 50 armored personnel carriers and 30 other vehicles, including bulldozers, rumbled into Maarakeh at 7:30 a.m. past checkpoints manned by French troops of the U.N. Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), security sources said.

They said the raid followed nine attacks on Israeli troops Friday, including two roadside bombings that Israel said injured four soldiers.

Ten Israelis, including two senior officers, have been killed and 50 wounded since mid-January, bringing Israel's toll to 621 dead and more than 3,700 wounded since its 1982 invasion of Lebanon to drive out Palestinian guerrillas.

Resistance intensified after Israel announced a phased pullout plan

from the south Jan. 14 and has continued unabated since troops left the Sidon area Feb. 16.

Yesterday's raid on Maarakeh was the biggest in the 11 days since the Israelis stepped up massive sweeps into a cluster of Shiite villages near Tyre that they see as guerrilla sanctuaries.

Security sources said troops interrogated 300 people and searched the village for arms, forcing shops open and breaking into empty houses.

"When the first two tanks appeared, everyone disappeared from the streets," said Patrick Baz, a Reuters photographer on the scene when the raid began. Helicopters made a dozen low-level passes over the village, he added.

He said villagers burned tires to block roads before the Israelis arrived but offered no other resistance and slowly emerged when troops

with megaphones ordered them to assemble at the local school.

A UNIFIL spokesman said 25 French troops in Maarakeh were reinforced by 10 U.N. military observers and the force's French deputy commander, Gen. Jean Pons.

"The French were all over the village," Baz said, adding that he heard three explosions during the half-hour he stayed with the Israelis in Maarakeh. Two more blasts were heard later, but there was no word on what caused them.

The Israelis barred access to members of the International Red Cross and seized film and a tape recorder from reporters.

Women in Maarakeh said that supplies of gas and cooking oil had run out, that flour prices had doubled and that gasoline supplies were very low because of Israeli restrictions on access to the village.

During a recent Israeli raid there, troops searching homes ransacked food stocks, they said.

Khalil Jeradi, head of the Shiite militia in Maarakeh, has been one of the more outspoken guerrilla leaders in boasting of the ability of the national resistance to keep up attacks.

Jeradi told the Associated Press last week that if the Israeli raids persisted, "we promise them four suicide raids a week. We have huge amounts of explosives and suicidal volunteers. Two or three offer themselves daily."

Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, commenting on the virulence of Shiite resistance in Lebanon, recently noted that suicide drivers willing to blow themselves up had attacked Israeli forces, something he said had not happened in more than 30 years of fighting Palestinian guerrillas.